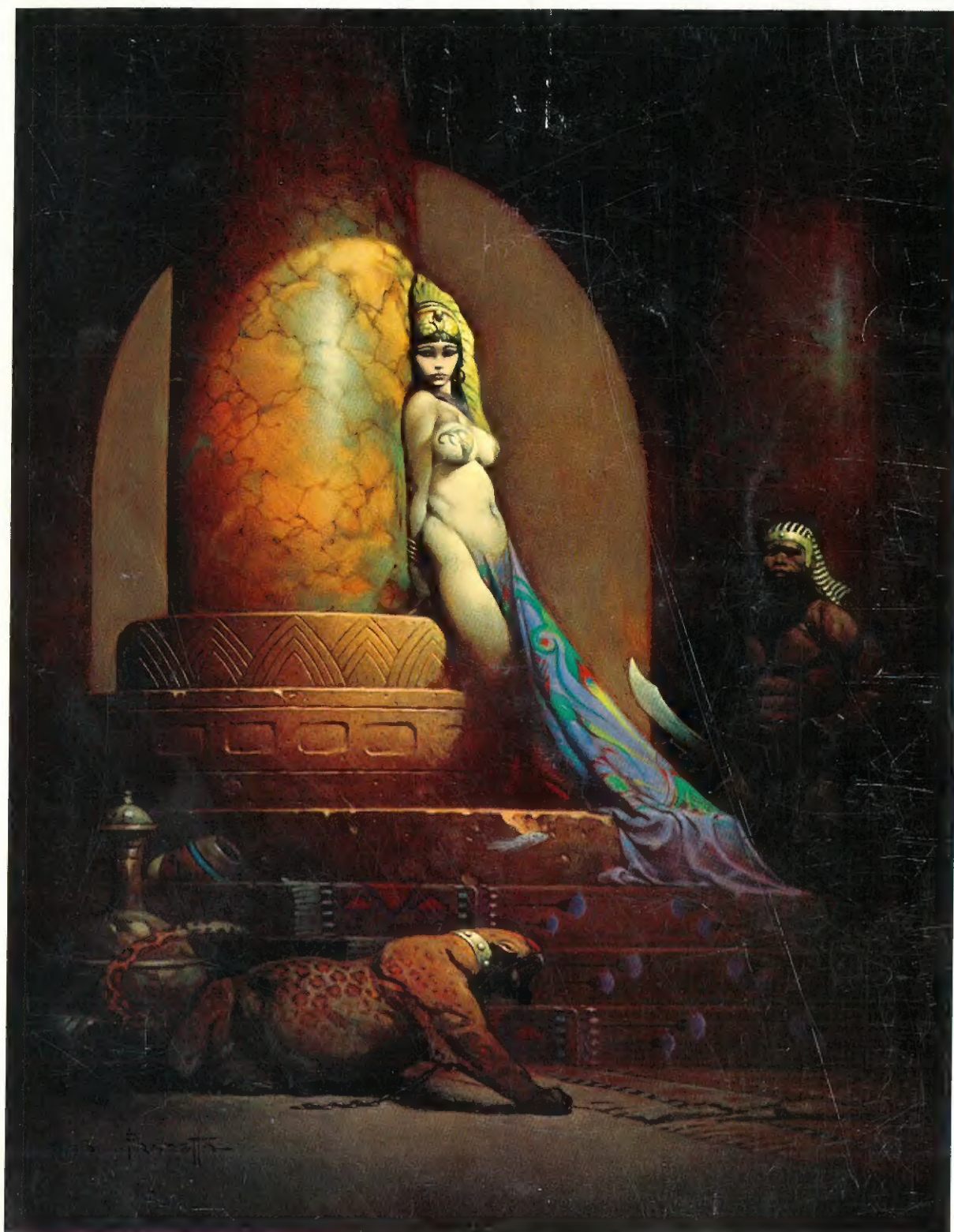


THE FANTASTIC ART OF FRANK FRAZETTA



Introduction by Betty Ballantine

Fantastic Art of

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FRANK
FRAZETTA



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INTRODUCTION

Brooklyn-born Frank Frazetta started drawing practically as soon as he could walk. At the tender age of three he was selling his work (true, to relatives, but he quickly expanded his activities to the denizens of his block. By the time he was eight he was wedded to a career in art. His teachers persuaded his parents to enter him in the Brooklyn Academy of Fine Arts, a small but exclusive school with students ranging from eight to eighty. Here, Frazetta was fortunate enough to encounter Michael Falanga. Under the tutelage of this fine Italian classicist for the next eight years of his life, the young artist's eye was put firmly on the path of reality—but never at the cost of the bouncing, ebullient life which is a hallmark of Frazetta's work.

When Frazetta was sixteen, his beloved mentor died and the young man was forced to think of ways to earn a living. He immediately entered the world of commercial art as an assistant to John Giunta, doing fill-in work on comicbooks. He did succeed in persuading Giunta to produce a comic which Frazetta himself had originated many years before as a child. It was actually published, under the title "Snowman" in *Tally-ho* Comics of December 1944. This was the start of a long career in the comicbook and comic strip field, a career which lasted



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more than twenty years, during which Frazetta produced an astonishing quantity and variety of work, everything from the "funny-animal" comic to the western, from adventure of all kinds to mystery and creepies, from fantasy to historical, all for various comic books. By 1949 he was working for three different comicbook publishers. In 1952 he added yet another of his own contributions, "Thun'da," the first issue of which has become a classic (it was the only one done by Frazetta). And he added yet another comicbook publisher, Entertaining Comics, to his list.

He was, of course, doing covers for the comics and in the early 1950's he created his famous Buck Rogers series. Not too long after that he worked on newspaper strips, and ended up for nine years working on "L'il Abner." It was an effort to break loose from the safety of a steady paycheck but eventually, at the insistence of his friend Roy Krenkel, he did. It never

occurred to him to do anything but go back to the comicbook field but the going was tough. Styles had changed. Frazetta was told his work looked "old-fashioned." He did odd jobs for men's magazines, eventually ending up with *Playboy* doing "Li'l Annie Fannie" along with Harvey Kurtzman, Will Elder and Jack Davis, the grand old gang that had done the early, vintage Mad comics. Frazetta worked exclusively on the women in this *Playboy* parody of the strips. It was not until 1964 that Frazetta began to hit his stride with paperbound book covers. There was a big Edgar Rice Burroughs boom and his rendition of Tarzan began to be compared with the early J. Allen St. John art. Soon Frazetta covers began to appear on the publications of several paperback houses. From the beginning, the quality of his work stood out from all the rest, to the point where readers frequently bought books not for their contents but for the cover art!





In the establishment world, and even in the popular marketplace, cartoon strips and comicbooks are not regarded as fine art. Peanuts may be universally beloved, Li'l Abner a national institution, Pogo everyman's philosopher and their creators highly respected. But few think of spending thousands of dollars in a gallery to buy an original Milt Caniff or Al Capp. Fewer still regard the strips as an acceptable training ground for fine art. Yet the strips, and particularly the comicbooks, have produced many a fine artist precisely because drawing for such a restrictive medium is a demanding discipline. The space in which an artist must work is clearly defined and very limited. The inescapable box must accommodate not only a storyline but an incredible amount of active, lively, appealing, striking action which itself tells a story. And the deadlines must be met, day after day. The profusion of work required demands ingenuity to avoid repetitive

imagery. Perspectives are manipulated and slewed for dramatic effect, exaggeration is mercilessly used to create freshness and difference. And beneath it all, any talented artist must be concerned with the stamp of his own individuality in a medium where, most often, he is called upon to imitate an already well established style. So the artists who do emerge from the maelstrom of the comics must, above all, have talent.

And this Frank Frazetta has in abundance. He also has drive, energy, power and a will to survive. All these qualities emerge in his paintings. He is, in toto, the perfect product of the school of comicbook art, for his work, while powerfully individual, shows the influence of its background in its heavily muscled hero figures and particularly in its intense composition which invariably directs the eye to the most important element of any painting. His background is implicit also in the quality of humor he has managed

to inject into the cover paintings for, for instance, the Flashman series. The Frazetta female, however, is uniquely his own. In contrast to the generally Varga-like comicbook ladies, the Frazetta female is small of stature but lushly rounded and curved. She is recognizable just about anywhere, whether over the withers of a horse, or the shoulder of a large human male, or sometimes contesting with gigantic creatures from paleolithic times or imperiously commanding a swamp monster, or controlling some fantastic creature of the deep. She is a sorceress, a child, a woman; she is erotic, she is improbable and lovely and very much alive.

As indeed are all the creatures of Frazetta's imagination. His painting is intensely alive, vibrant, even when the figures are in repose. It is perhaps this quality of life, of energy, which most signally sets Frazetta's work apart from all others in comparable fields. Anything that has movement

captures his attention—his great cats, reptiles, horses, animals of all kinds, and of course his fiercely battling male figures of Vikings, stonemen, primitives of one kind or another; the writhing roots and branches of trees, the ebb and flow and swirl of water—nothing in the typical Frazetta painting is really still. His work is all sinuosity and movement. Yet the trappings that surround all this vivid life are well done too, the textures of stone and bone and leather, of heavily wrought metals, of armor. What is often overlooked in a Frazetta painting because of his own strong tendency to emphasize its dominant element, is the subtle work that occurs in the background, the half-hidden figures, the glimpsed detail of some portion of a creature hinting at gigantic size, the shadowy suggestions of hosts unbidden to prominence.

Few of Frazetta's paintings are tranquil. Even the lovely "Galleon" (Plate 25) floating gently in air,

seems to carry an echo of life, as though it had only just been abandoned. The plates in this volume are arranged in chronological order and the movement from comicbook style to pure Frazetta is very clear. Yet the thirty full plates included here represent, in fact, only a small part of Frazetta's work to date. He has a wide range of subject interests and has done work for a variety of forms, including the movies and advertising. For some years now, Ellie Frazetta has made a practice of collecting the

originals of her husband's work. Often, dissatisfied with a subject once it comes back from the publisher, Frazetta will go to work on it again, sometimes changing the first concept quite considerably. The publishers are fortunate in having had access to this original source material from which to obtain the particularly fine reproduction in this volume. We hope, in this book and in future volumes, to do justice to the remarkable qualities of a very remarkable artist.

Betty Ballantine.



1) THE EXECUTIONER

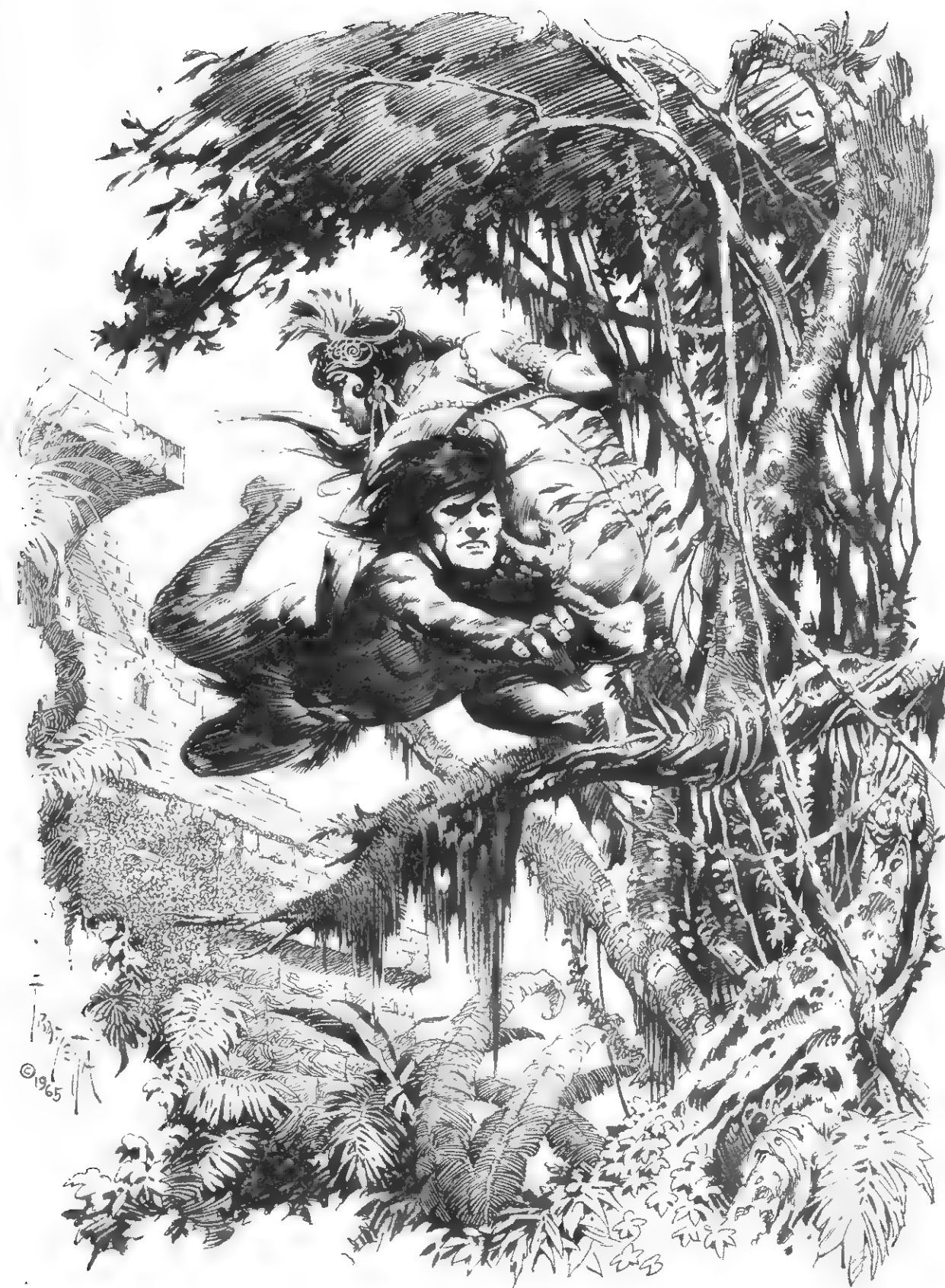


2) STONE AGE



3) CAVEMAN





5) WOLFMOON



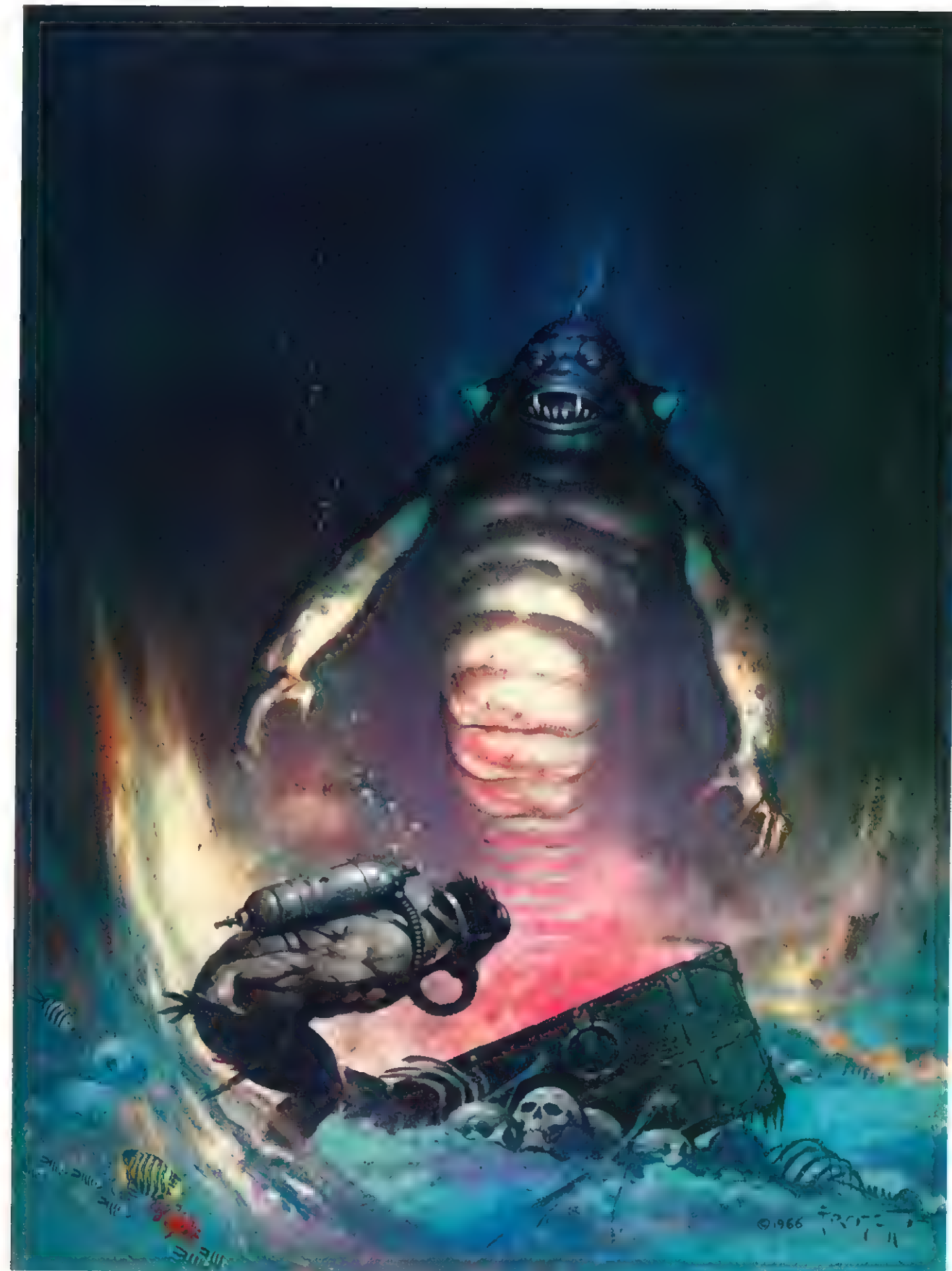




8) NEANDERTHAL



9) SEA MONSTER







12) GREEN DEATH





14) THE APPARITION







16) Detail from "THE SNOW GIANTS"

17) THE SNOW GIANTS





19) WOMAN WITH A SCYTHE







21) EGYPTIAN QUEEN





24) THE SILVER WARRIOR





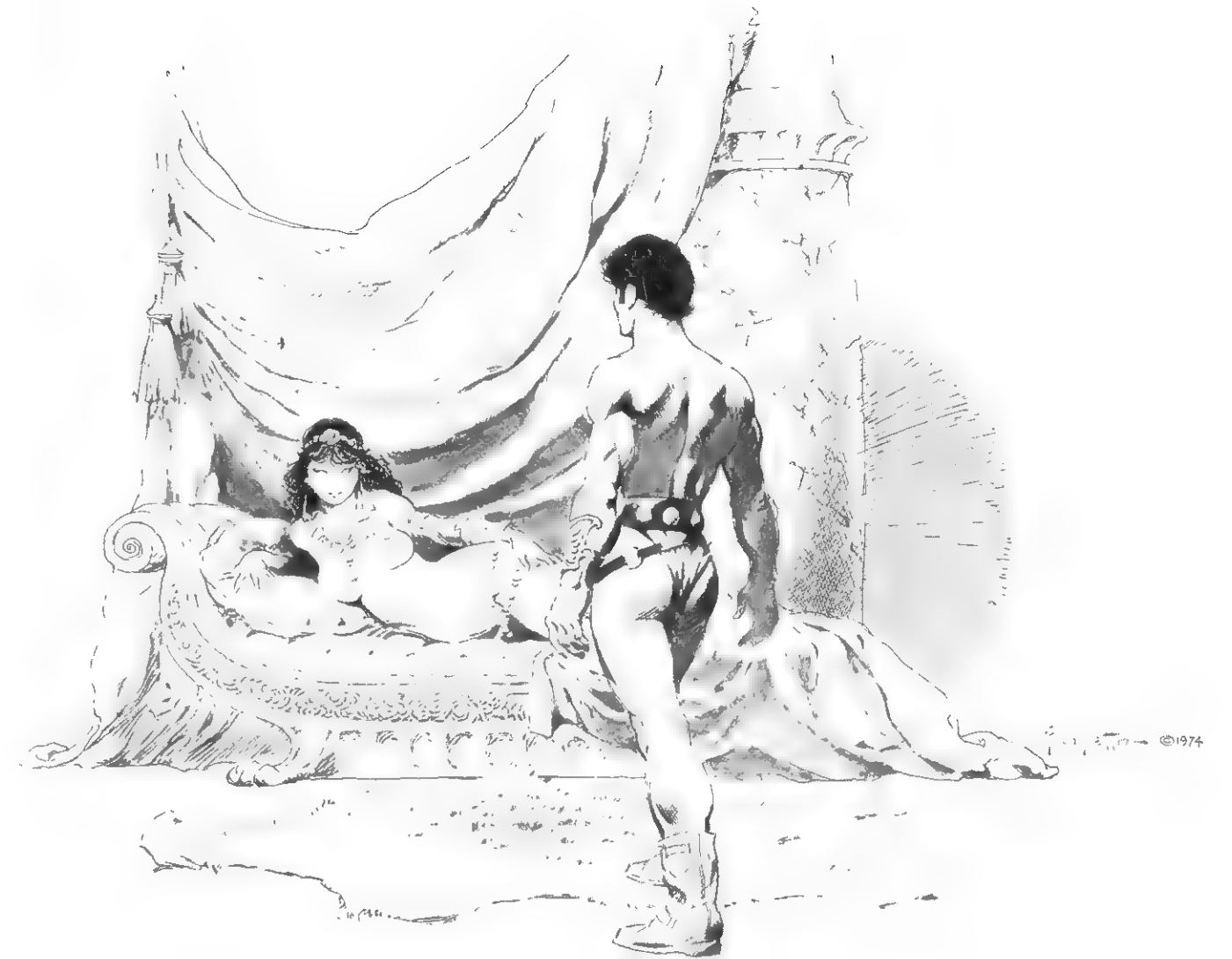




27) "Behind us came the fighting men of Ugor."
From *A Fighting Man of Mars*, by Edgar Rice Burroughs



28) "With wide, distended jaws came the great white lizard."
From *A Fighting Man of Mars*, by Edgar Rice Burroughs



29) "Her veiled eyes seemed to read my very soul."
From *Swords of Mars*, by Edgar Rice Burroughs

30) Detail from "THE DEATH DEALER"























41) Detail from "THE
BARBARIAN"





42) SEA WITCH



In the art of fantastic illustration the work of Frazetta stands alone—unique in the effectiveness of its lushly sensuous exaggeration, powerful and dramatic, with a sure sense of composition that invariably directs the eye to the most important element in any painting.